68: Mouhot--105-106 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians-1-2
116, 631, 122, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"On the 28th February, 1861, I arrived at the town of Chaiapume, [HD: at that time a Laotian town tributary to Siam] and presented myself before the governor to request his permission to hire some elephants or oxen to enable me to continue my journey. I showed him my French passport, and also gave him the letter from Khrom Luang, [HD: one of the brothers of the King of Siam] and another from the Governor of Korat; [HD: an important outlying province of Siam. See category 116, p. 115] but all in vain. He replied that, if I wanted oxen or elephants, there were plenty in the forest. I might easily have done without the assistance of this functionary, and procured animals from people in the village; but they would have made me pay two or three times the ordinary price, and my purse was too slenderly filled to allow of my submitting to this extortion, which would probably be repeated at every station.

The only thing left me to do, therefore, was to retrace my steps, and, leaving one of my servants at Korat with [106] my baggage, to return to Bangkok and claim aid from the consul, the ministers, or the king himself; for there is a treaty between the Governments of Siam and France, concluded by M. de Montigny, which obliges the king to afford assistance and protection to the French, and especially to missionaries and naturalists. It was a sad loss of time for me, and might occasion me serious inconvenience; for if I were delayed, the rainy season might surprise me in the midst of the

forests before I could reach a healthier region, and the consequences might be fatal. However, I was forced to submit, and I returned to Bangkok."

68: Mouhot--119-120 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 122, 175, 487

"To consult any existing maps of Indo-China for my guidance in the interior of Laos [HD: i.e. territory which is now central and northeastern Siam] would have been a folly, no traveller, at least to my knowledge, having penetrated into east Laos, or published any authentic information respecting it. To question the natives about places more than a degree distant would have been useless. My desire was to reach Louang-Prabang by land, to visit the northern tribes dependent on that state, and then again to descend the Mekong to Cambodia. Setting out from Korat, [HD: in Siam, northeast of Bangkok] I had but to proceed northwards as long as I found practicable roads and inhabited places; and if I could not go by a direct route to Louang-Prabang, I [120] should only have to diverge to the east when I judged it necessary."

68: Mouhot--120-121 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116. 609. 122. 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"I was again delayed a few days at Korat before I could obtain elephants, in consequence of the absence of the viceroy; but on his return he received me in a friendly manner, and gave me a letter of introduction to the governors of the provinces under his jurisdiction. He likewise furnished me with two elephants for myself and servants, and two others for my baggage; so at last I was able to set out for Chaiapume. Before I started, the Chinese with whom I lodged gave me the following advice: --'Buy a tam-tam, and, wherever you halt, sound it. They will say, "Here is an officer of the king;" robbers will keep aloof, and the authorities will respect you. If this does not answer, the only plan to get rid of all the difficulties which the Laotian officials will be sure to throw in your way is to have a good stick, the longer the better. Try it on the back of any mandarin who makes the least resistance and will not do what you wish. Put all delicacy aside. Laos is not like a country of the whites. Follow my advice, and you will find it good.'

I was, however, much better received on my second visit to Chaiapume, and required neither tam-tam nor cane. The sight of the elephants and the order from the viceroy of Korat made the mandarin as supple as a glove, and he provided me with other elephants for a visit to some ruins existing about 3 leagues north of the town, at the foot of a mountain. The superstitious Laotians say that [121]these ruins contain gold, but that every one who has sought for it has been struck with madness."

68: Mouhot--129-130 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 122, 609, 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"[HD: Going north to Pak Lai] I soon found that, but for the letter from the governor of Korat, I should have met everywhere with the same reception as at Chaiapume; however, this missive was very positively worded. Wherever I went, the authorities were ordered to furnish me with elephants, and supply me with all necessary provisions, as if I were a king's envoy. I was much amused to see these petty provincial chiefs executing the orders of my servants, and evidently in dread lest, following the Siamese custom, I should use the stick.

One of my men, to give himself importance, had tied one of these bugbears to the arms which he carried, and the sight of it alone sufficed, with the sound of the tam-tam, to inspire fear, whilst small presents judiciously distributed, and a little money to the cornacs, [HD: elephant drivers] procured me the sympathy of the people.

Most of the villages are situated about a day's journey from one another, but frequently you have to travel for three or four days without seeing a single habitation, [130] and then you have no alternative but to sleep in the jungle."

68: Mouhot--251 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 122, 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"I have done everything in my power to obtain letters and passports [HD: to Laos] from the French and Siamese authorities here, [HD: i.e. in Bangkok, Siam] but all have been nearly useless. I have obtained nothing but a letter from the King's brother, [HD: Khrom Luang] who has the superintendence of the provinces north of Laos, and with that I trust to be able to get on."

68: Mouhot--256-257 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 122, 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"When I reached Chaiapume, I went to the governor with my letters, and asked him to lend me elephants to enable me to continue my journey, that being the only method of travelling among these mountains; but he refused me decidedly, and consequently I have been forced to retrace my steps. Here one can do nothing without the help of the people in power.

I therefore returned to Korat, and established Phrai in a [257] hut which I hired of a Chinese; and went myself to Bangkok, to procure from the authorities orders to the different governors of provinces to aid me instead of throwing obstacles in my way."

68: Mouhot--258-260 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians-1-4
116, 122, 609, 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"[HD: Excerpt from one of Mouhot's letters to his wife] You will be much surprised on receiving this letter to see it dated from Saraburi, [HD: in Siam] for if you have received the one I wrote in January, you must believe me to be already in Laos. But man proposes, and God disposes. However, to reassure you, I must begin by saying that I am in perfect health, and full of strength and hope. All goes well with me.

I had in fact reached Laos. I arrived at Korat after a tedious and troublesome journey, for I had only a few oxen for my baggage, and was forced to walk myself. From there I went to Chaiapume, and here an animal of the mandarin species made himself great, and under the pretext of having no elephants refused me the means of going further, and was so rude and impolite to me that I determined at once to return and protest against the very insufficient protection which had been granted to me. Indeed, I could do nothing else, not being able to go on. The elephant which had brought me to Chaiapume took me back to Korat, and there I found a mandarin from Bangkok, who had been sent to fetch a white elephant which had been taken in Laos. I begged him to let me join his party, and he lent me two elephants, one for my servant and luggage, and one for myself. I left Phrai at Korat, with the greater part of my possessions, having hired a room for him in the house of a Chinese, and a week afterwards found myself back at Saraburi, in company with this strange divinity (who, by the way, had

more black than white about him), and of the grand personage who had been sent to escort him, and who had showered on him every kind of attention during the journey. He had an escort of fifty foot soldiers and several on horseback. As for me, I wanted for nothing; at every halt the mandarin sent me ducks, fish, fruit, sweetmeats, &c., and he was [259] also kind enough to allow me eight men as night-guards to watch round my fire. In return, I discovered for him in the mountains large quantities of copper, and even gold, which delighted him.

The whole province of Saraburi was in motion to do honour to the white elephant; the King and all his court are coming here; the ministers are here already to watch over him. I decided, therefore, to apply to the Siamese, hoping to obtain more from them than from the Europeans; and yesterday hearing of the arrival of Khrom Luang, the King's brother, I hastened to address myself to him. He, however, had only passed through, and was gone to Prabat, to join the King. However, I found here the man I wanted, the mandarin who has most interest in Laos, and without a letter from whom it would have been difficult to proceed. I did not know him, but I went to him to ask about the Prince, and told him what I wanted. 'I am your man,' said he; 'the Prince can only give an order for me to write a letter, such as I will give you, if you like.' I accepted gladly, and promised him in return my double-barrelled gun, which I could easily replace, 'if

he would only furnish me with the means of travelling through Laos without expense, and would bring the Chaiapume mandarin to reason.' The poor governor of Saraburi was with us, and had to remain more than an hour amidst a number of others kneeling on the bare ground, while I was seated on the mat of the mandarin, by his side, eating sweetmeats and drinking tea, while he dictated a letter in which he called the governor of Chaiapume a fool, and threatened to deprive him of his office, and of this letter I was to be the bearer; and he promised me another general one on the morrow, in which he stated that if I did not receive efficient aid it might bring on a war; [HD: i.e. with France who was then occupying Cochinchina] and this he also repeated to all the chiefs present. My cause was gained, and I could plainly see that our affairs must be going on well in Cochin China; the echo of the cannon had its effect in Siam. However, I had pro-
[260] mised him my gun, and evidently he wished to have it before he gave me the letters This morning, therefore, I took it to him all cleaned and furbished up. He was delighted with it, and gave me at once the letter for Korat and Chaiapume, and to-morrow I am to have one which will carry me all through Laos without any expense but a few ticals to the cornacs. [HD: i.e. elephant drivers] Without this, judging by what I had to pay for an elephant from Korat to Chaiapume, my purse would have been exhausted by the time I reached the north of Laos, and I should not have had the means of returning without

sending to Bangkok to ask for help, which would have been a work of difficulty, and, what is worse, I should have been exposed all along the route to the insolence of these arrogant mandarins. Now, they will all humble themselves before me, taking me for some important personage sent by the Emperor Napoleon or Queen Victoria to collect butterflies, insects, and birds for them. I shall no longer travel on foot, but on elephants, and shall want for nothing. Agree, then, with me, that out of evil comes good, or rather, that God does all for the best. When at Chaiapume I found myself obliged to retrace my steps, after so many fatigues, and so great a waste of money, I was only downcast for a few minutes; God almost immediately inspired me with the idea that all would turn to my advantage, and this persuasion never left me again. Unaccountably to myself, I was gayer on my return than I had been in coming, although then I was everywhere well received and kindly treated by the people. Even after my discourteous reception [HD: by the mandarin] at Chaiapume, all the inhabitants came to see me, to bring me little presents, and to express their regret that they could not aid me from fear of their chief. The head of the monastery took me to see some ruins similar to those in Cambodia, and gave me a tiger-skin; and all along the road I experienced the same kindness, and numbers came to me to ask for advice and various remedies."

68: Mouhot--276-277 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians-1-2
116, 122, 174, 609, 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

"Notwithstanding the small population of Korat, it is the chief town of a province, or rather an extensive state, containing eleven towns or boroughs, chief towns of districts, and a great number of villages, more or less populated. Fifteen days' [277] journey brings you from Korat to Bassac on the banks of the Mekon, and in the same latitude.

My intention was to proceed northwards, only stopping in the province of Louang Prabang, and then to descend the river as far as Cambodia. I hired elephants, and five days after, having passed through several villages inhabited by the descendants of ancient Siamese colonists who had taken refuge there in time of war, passing continually through forests of resin trees thinly scattered, I arrived at Ban Prang, a village where I discovered a ruined tower, and also the remains of an ancient temple. The next place I arrived at was Chaiapoune, the principal Laotian town in the north, and the chief town of the district. Here also I found ruins; but they were inconsiderable, and seemed more like a Laotian imitation than the work of Khmer Dôme. The inscriptions on the other temples in the province of Korat resemble those of Ongcor: here I found upon a block of broken slate-stone an inscription in Laotian characters, but which is unintelligible even to the inhabitants of the country. These, with some remains of idols and towers at the foot of a mountain in the district, were the only vestiges of that ancient

68: Mouhot--276-277 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians-2
116, 122, 174, 609, 631, 177.63 Siam
636.63

civilization which I discovered in the north. Everything leads me to suppose that here also were the limits which separated the kingdom of Cambodia from that of Vieng Thiane, destroyed during the last war which the Siamese raised against the Western Laotians or white-bellies. It was in this district that I was stopped in my travels by the authorities of the country, who treated me with great rudeness, and who forbade the people to let me have any means of transport, even after seeing my passport. I was therefore obliged to retrace my steps, deploring the expense and loss of time in the best part of the year, and which will cause me serious inconvenience."

has created a center for the study of Laos which will enable the country to be better known and better loved. From these works new elements will arise which will serve as a base for more detailed works which the reader can study to his advantage, while awaiting the publication of a new edition of this modest tract, whose only ambition is to increase the understanding of the habits, customs, and traditions of the Muong Lao.

May we express here our profound gratitude to His Royal Highness Prince Savang Vathana, heir to the throne, for the friendly interest he has ever shown in our work. We express our thanks to His Highness Boun Oum, Prince of Champassak, who has kindly pointed out to us monuments till now unknown. To L. L. E. E. Thao Kou Abhay, president of the King's Council and to Thao Nhouy Abhay, former minister, we are also indebted for certain information for which we are grateful. We thank Mr. Michaudel for the friendly and constant help he has given to the French School [5] of the Far East in Laos, and we also thank Mr. Malleret, director of this school, who has made useful suggestions. Finally, we express our thanks to Prince Souvanna Phouma and to the Princess for the consideration they have shown us on many occasions and for the encouragement they have given to this work.

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[7]

HISTORICAL SKETCH

"...Then, Phou Lan Xon, messenger of Phaya Then, king of the sky, took a red-hot iron and pierced the gourd. Immediately a crowd of men sprang forth. There were so many that the opening was not large enough to let them through, so larger openings were made with scissors."

Such is the origin of the two groups of people of Laos. The Khas, who came out of the opening made by the red-hot iron, were blackened by the cinders; the Thais, who came through holes made by scissors, kept their fair complexion.

However original, this charming legend is far from giving us precise information about the first inhabitants of Laos. As a famous scholar has already bitterly remarked, it is the beginnings about which we know the least. Alas, Laos is no exception to this rule. The historian who attempts to retrace the events which have occurred in this country from the origins to the 13th century, at which period documents with substantial proofs are available, finds himself in much the same position as an ant lost in a sieve. The holes are more